



November 22, 2004



As trial begins, Providence man admits to firearms offense

William M. Thompson, 21, of Providence, pleaded guilty today to being a felon in possession of a firearm, admitting that he had a nine-millimeter rifle in his possession in a car that Providence Police stopped in February. Thompson admitted to the offense after the first witness testified at his trial today in U.S. District Court.

United States Attorney Robert Clark Corrente announced the guilty plea, which Thompson entered before Chief U.S. District Court Judge Ernest C. Torres. Thompson is detained pending sentencing, which is scheduled for February 11 before Judge Torres.

As Thompson's trial began today, Assistant U.S. Attorney Zechariah Chafee presented one witness, Providence Patrolman Angelo A'vant, who testified that, on February 26, he and his partner, Patrolman Fabio Zuena, observed Thompson leave 132 Calla Street, carrying what appeared to be a rifle wrapped in a pink bag. Thompson got into the passenger side of a vehicle, which drove away. The officers followed in their unmarked car and radioed for back-up officers.

A cruiser approached from the opposite direction on Thackeray Street and the two police cars boxed in the vehicle in which Thompson was riding. As he approached the vehicle, Officer A'vant saw Thompson with his hands up and the rifle, a nine-millimeter, semi-automatic, between his legs. The rifle was loaded with a full, ten-round magazine.

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During a break following A'vant's direct testimony, Thompson signaled his desire to plead guilty and a plea hearing ensued. Thompson has prior state felony convictions for drug possession and, as a felon, is prohibited from possessing firearms. The statutory maximum penalty for being a felon in possession of a firearm is 10 years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine. Federal sentencing is determined on the basis of guidelines that rely on such factors as the specific nature of an offense and a defendant's criminal background.

Providence Police and the **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives** investigated the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Chafee is prosecuting it.

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